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The Church of the East & Its Theology: History of Studies

In touch with the Church of Antioch, the Church of Mesopotamia attracted the attention of many Greek authors, first of all, those of the Eastern part of the Roman, afterwards Byzantine, Empire, who witnessed the appearance of centres of theological thought in the Aramaic East. The writings of the Eastern authors were read in wider circles than those they were intended for. Thus, the *Legend of Abgar* and the *Teaching of Addai*, documents referring to the very origins of Christianity in Mesopotamia, became widely known.

The persecutions that the Christians of the East suffered under the Sasanids had an impact on Christians living in the 'Western lands', and Aphrahat, the first great author of the Aramaic theological tradition, who mentions the persecutions in his *Demonstrations*, soon became well known there.

The *Persian Schools* of Edessa and Nisibin,[1] headed by Mār Ya'qōḇ of Nisibis and his disciple Ephrem the Syrian (Mār 'Aprēm Suryāyā) won an *œcumenical* celebrity and played a decisive rôle in the formation of the Mesopotamian school of exegesis and theology, as well as in the gradually developing polemics between representatives of increasingly different traditions of the 'West' and the 'East' of the Christian world. The controversies, especially bitter over the Christological terminology and concepts, were abundantly reflected in the writings of many 'Western' authors. This period — when, in the arguments, different systems of theology were developed — concludes with the summarizing works of a prominent 'Melkite', the last Greek writer of the East, John of Damascus. After him, the polemical works of Byzantine-oriented authors, as it is seen in the writings of 'Abd Allāh b. Al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī, introduced no new terms and formulas and dealt with a speculative 'Nestorianism' formulated earlier.

The witness of Islāmic religious comparative studies is therefore of some value. The confessions of different religious communities, including the Church of the East, were analysed by Moslem researchers, ex-

[1] Commonly known as Nisibis.

ploring the religions in the Caliphate in the 9th to 15th centuries. This subject was touched on by such famous authors as Ibn an-Nadīm (10th c.), Abû-r-Rayḥān al-Bayrûnī (973-1048/51), Ibn Ḥazm (994-1064), aš-Šahrastānī (1076-1153), Aḥmad al-Qalqašandī (1355-1418). Less known is a later work by the 14th-century Yemenite author 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Faḫrī — Kitāb talḫīṣ al-bayān fī ḏikr firaq ahl al-adyān.[2] In the Moslem literature of the Ottoman era one can hardly find any work of this kind.

Occasional testimonies occur in itineraries, mainly by pilgrims to Jerusalem. This material is rather extensive (4th to 14th c. there are more than thirty such reports) and insufficiently studied. Valuable observations for the history of the doctrines of the Church of the East could be found in journals of missionary travellers interested in confessional matters. The books by Giovanni di Pian del Carpine and Willem van Roysbroeck, also known as Guillaume de Roubrouquis (in whose journal André de Longjumeau's travel notes are mentioned) are of special interest. They are followed by Marco Polo's book and the notes by Giovanni di Monte Corvino. The later testimonies of the European travellers to Asia could be related to this body of documents as well. It is also worth mentioning the journal of Jan Huygen van Linschoten (travel 1595-96)[3] and the book by Nicolas Trigault (travels 1607-19).[4]

From the middle of the 15th century, the relationship between the Church of the East and the Western world is witnessed to by another group of documents. They appear as a result of appeals to the Holy See for the 'restoring of communion' made by separate communities of the Church of the East. The first appeal of the sort was made by Metropolitan Timotheus of Tarsus, responsible for the community of the Christian refugees who had fled from Timur to Cyprus. On behalf of his flock, he presented a confession of faith and asked for reception into full communion with 'the Holy Roman Church'.[5] On 7th August 1445, this appeal was read out during a sessions of the council of Florence and, at the same day, the first union with the 'Assyro-Chaldeans' was proclaimed by the papal bull *Benedictus sit Deus*. From 1552 onwards, such documents appear regularly. That year, Yoḥannān Sulāqā, the prior of the monastery of Rabbān Hōrmīz,[6] was sent to Rome and, on his return, became the head of a hierarchy separated from the Patriarch of the Church of

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[2] علی بن محمد عبد الله الفخری، كتاب تلخيص البيان في ذكر فرق اهل الاديان, Moscow, 1988.

[3] van Linschoten, 1596; 1598; Repr. 1885.

[4] Trigautius, 1616.

[5] Le Quien, 1740, t. 2, p. 1292.

[6] Vosté, 1930, 1931; Habbi, 1966, pp. 99-132, 199-230.

the East, but recognised by the Pope.[7] Later on, a similar separated branch was to become the so called Chaldean Church.

In Europe, concern about the Christian presence in the Near and the Far East was increased not only by reports of the Catholic orders working there, but also by publications intended for a wider reading public. Thanks to one of these publications, undertaken by a Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680), interested in exotic subjects of any kind, the oldest Chinese Christian monument — the stele of Xian-fu — was first presented to Europeans.[8] The fact that two homilies of the Catholicos of the Church of the East Mār 'Elīyā al-Ḥadīṭī (1190) were published as an appendix to the popular Arabic Grammar by Thomas van Erpe (1584-1624)[9] is indirect evidence of public interest in the field. Another example of this kind was published by a learned Maronite Ibrāhīm al-Ḥākilānī commonly known as Abraham Ecchellensis (1605-1664) *Tractatus continens catalogum librorum Chaldaeorum, tam ecclesiasticorum quam profanorum*[10] by Mār 'Aḇdīšō' bar Brīḵā. Occasionally, extensive studies of the Eastern Churches, also concerning the Church of the East, had begun to appear, such as the *Historia orientalis* by a Swiss philologist and theologian Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620-1667),[11] the relevant sections of the dictionary *Bibliothèque orientale* by a French orientalist Barthélemy d'Herbelot (1625-1695),[12] and *Histoire critique des dogmes des chrétiens orientaux* by a French biblical critic and orientalist Richard Simon (1638-1712).[13]

As previously unknown documents were gathered, a need for their analysis and classification emerged. This was undertaken by the scholars from a Maronite family of Assemani (as-Sim'ānī), above all by Joseph Simon (1687-1768), the most illustrious of them. Sent by the Pope to the East for the purpose of collecting Oriental manuscripts, he accomplished his task zealously and successfully. Manuscripts from all over the Near East were brought to the Vatican Library, and a gigantic work that Joseph Simon planned to carry out — the *Bibliotheca Orientalis* — was to comprise twelve volumes of which only the first four appeared.[14] He also

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[7] Vosté, 1930, 1931; Habbi, 1966, pp. 99-132, 199-230.

[8] Kircher, 1636.

[9] van Erpe, 1656.

[10] Ecchellensis, 1653.

[11] Hottinger, 1660.

[12] d'Herbelot, 1697.

[13] Simon, 1711.

[14] Assemanus, 1719, 1721, 1725, 1728. Several unpublished volumes, already largely prepared by the author, were destroyed by fire.

began the six-volume series of works by Ephrem the Syrian, of which the first three volumes he edited himself.[15] Probably impressed by the edition, Cardinal Nicolo Antonelli published the *Sancti Patris nostri Iacobi episcopi Nisibeni Sermones* that were in fact homilies by Aphrahat.[16] Another member of the Assemani family, Joseph Aloysius (1710-1782), also prepared a series of publications concerning the Church of the East, among which the most significant were *De Catholicis seu Patriarchis Chaldaeorum et Nestorianorum commentarius historico-chronologicus*[17] and a Latin version of Mār 'Abdīšō' bar Brīkā's *Collectio Canonum* published by Cardinal Angelo Mai in his *Scriptorum Veterum Nova Collectio*.[18] The third of the Assemanis, a nephew of the two preceding brothers, Stephanus Evodius (1707-1782) was a permanent assistant to his two uncles at the Vatican Library and took the post of the keeper of the Vatican Library after the death of Josephus Simonius. Among his works it is worth mentioning the *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium et Occidentalium*, the first part of which gives the history of the martyrs who suffered during the reign of the Sasanian kings of Persia,[19] and *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus*[20] that was prepared in collaboration with Joseph Aloysius. The second and the third parts of the first volume of the latter were on the Syriac manuscripts. Alongside with the Assemanis' works, the *Oriens Christianus* by a French historian and theologian Michel Le Quien (1661-1733)[21] should be mentioned and *Histoire du Christianisme des Indes* by Mathurin Vayssière de la Croze, the librarian of the king of Prussia.

These works, and above all the *Bibliotheca Orientalis* by Joseph Simon, brought to light a great number of documents concerning the history and the theology of the Church of the East and summarised the great work that had been done up to that moment in collecting the material, thus initiating a study of them as we would understand it. So began a long scholarly process of the extensive heritage of the Church of the East, made possible through a Latin translation, that continues into our time. The voluminous works of the eighteenth century had the effect of a

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[15] *Ephraemi Syri*, 1732-1746. The series was continued by the Maronites Jesuit Mubarak and Stephanus Evodius Assemani.

[16] Antonelli, 1756, 1765.

[17] Assemani, J. A., 1775; repr.1969.

[18] Pt. I, pp. vii, viii and 1-168; pt. II, pp. 1-268, etc.

[19] Assemanus, S. E., 1748.

[20] [Assemanus, S. E. & J. A.], 1756-69.

[21] Le Quien, 1740.

Summa; further research was undertaken after a while, with another approach and in another direction.

In the nineteenth century, there was a continuing increase in the number of new publications concerning, directly or not, the history and the theology of the Church of the East. Thanks to political events and trade interests, the presence of representatives of the Western world and Russia in the East grew considerably. Their impressions from actually meeting the faithful and clergymen of the Church of the East — journals, itineraries — are an important factor for our theme. Identifying themselves by their own denomination, the Englishmen and Americans bore witness to their encounter with 'Nestorians', and tried to re-analyse how much the doctrines of the 'Easterners' corresponded with their own. The notes of Justin Perkings (1805-1869), a minister of the Congregational church who had been a missionary in Persia since 1834 and was famous for his great contribution to translating the Bible into Modern Assyrian, are among the first.[22] The book by a missionary physician Dr. Asahel Grant (1807-1844), in which he tried to prove he had discovered the "lost tribes" of Israel, shows how little these Westerners knew about those they dealt with.[23] The most interesting publications of that time was a two-volume work by George Percy Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*,[24] where he exposed and analysed the doctrines of the Church of the East basing his studies on its own confessional and liturgical literature. This work had a significant impact on an interested public. Unfortunately, Badger considered the doctrines of the Church of the East in comparison with the "39 articles" of Anglicanism, his own denomination, which could not prevent him from making some mistakes.

Unlike the eighteenth century studies with their tendency to summarise the original works, those undertaken in the nineteenth century represent a wide range of different researches. Beside papers by the missionaries working in the Near East, some articles on the monuments of the mission of the Church of the East in the Far East[25] and some collections of Syriac manuscripts were published.[26] The history of the early councils and the authors of that time attracted a renewed interest It might happen that one and the same researcher had rather different domains of interest, but all concerned the history or the theology of

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[22] Perkins, 1843.

[23] Grant, 1845; Laurie, 1853.

[24] Badger, 1852.

[25] Buchanan, 1811; Havret, 1833; Pauthier, 1857, 1858; Spasskij, 1860; Palladij (Kafarov), 1872.

[26] Payne-Smith, 1864; Wright, 1870-1872; Zotenberg, 1874.

Church of the East. Thus, Eduard Sachau (1845-1930), a prominent semitologist, was involved in collecting Syriac manuscripts and studying writings of the authors of the Antiochene School as well as Christian monuments in Turkestan and China. In 1869, he published a collection of extant remnants of writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia — the fact that showed a public interest in the heritage of great authors of the Antiochene and Mesopotamian traditions of exegesis and theology.[27] In 1880-1882, Theodore's Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul was published by an English biblical, patristic scholar, and theologian Henry Barclay Swete (1835-1917)[28]; in the meantime, Jacques Forget published his dissertation on Aphrahat.[29] Works of Ignazio Guidi (1844-1935) should also be mentioned here, in particular, his study on the East-Syrian hierarchy.[30] From the latter half of the 19th century on, researchers focused their studies on particular authors of the 'Eastern' tradition. At the close of the same century, some events showed, however, that one would have to study a great deal further to get an adequate and integrated notion of the tradition of the Church of the East. On 14th of November 1885, Dr. F. V. Poyarkov published a newspaper report (*Vostochnoe Obozrenie*, N° 44) where he wrote that he had discovered a number of grave stones with signs of the cross and inscriptions in Syriac and Turkic of the 13—14 c. near Tokmak. A similar discovery was made somewhat earlier that year by N. N. Pantusov near Pishpek (now Bishkek). These findings indicated the extensive spread of the Church of the East in the Middle Ages, and had a significant impact on researchers who issued a series of publications on the subject.[31] It was evident, however, that some of them had been perplexed,[32] and that the reports from Kurdistān and the current views on the details of the theology of the Church of the East would not be adequate to understand the latter's tradition. A great deal of material concerning the East Syriac heritage of this Church and the monuments of its mission towards the East until then unknown had still to be studied.

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[27] Sachau, 1869.

[28] Swete, 1880-1882.

[29] Forget, 1882; The studies on Aphrahat were continued by Jean Parisot: Parisot, 1894, 1907.

[30] Guidi, 1889.

[31] Pantusov, 1886a,b; Chwolson, 1890, 1897; Lyutov, 1886; Nikol'skij, 1888; Radloff, 1888; Slutskij, 1889-1891; Rosen, 1890; Halévy, 1890; Barthold, 1893; Korsch, 1893

[32] Jean Halévy (Halévy, 1890), for example, supposed, with no trace of humour, that the fact that the grave inscriptions had been dated according to the animal calendar meant that there had been some influence from Egypt!

During the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, many serious monographs as well as significant works concerning the Church of the East appeared. It would not be easy to give a summary of them since they were numerous and, in addition, they were not the result of the work of groups or schools, but rather of individual researchers. One can only survey here the most important publications and discoveries of that time. The most valuable was the publication of the collection of the acts of the Synods of the Church of the East, 5th to 7th centuries — *Sunhādōs* or *Synodicon Orientale*, with German[33] and then French[34] translations. Jean-Baptist Chabot who published the French *Synodicon*, was by that time already known for several works on the East-Syrian Church and, in particular, on the history of the famous centre of Christian Mesopotamia — the School of Nisibis[35] (on which a detailed monograph was later written by Arthur Vööbus[36]) — and on Mār Narsai, an outstanding figure for the history of that School as well as for the history of the development of the theology of the Church of the East as a whole.[37] In the *Journal asiatique,* where Chabot often published his articles, another important text appeared: the homily of Mār Narsai dedicated to 'The Greek Doctors' — Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius — in which one could see what the place was that each of them had occupied in the theological tradition of the Church of the East.[38] In 1905 a two volume edition of homilies and hymns by Mār Narsai was issued by Rev. Alphonse Mingana (1878-1937) in Mosul[39]; in 1909 a collection of Narsai's liturgical homilies was published by Dom Richard Hugh Connolly and Edmund Bishop.[40]

Publications of that kind contributed to a revision of the common prejudices about the East-Syrian tradition and showed that its connection with 'Nestorianism', around which a scandal had broken in Constantinopole in 5th c., was just of a limited kind. They also demonstrated how Theodore and Nestorius, rejected eventually by all Western Christianity, had in fact been perceived in the East. When, in 1910, abbé François Nau published *Liber Heraclidis,* a translation from Syriac of an

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[33] Braun, 1900.

[34] Chabot, 1902.

[35] Chabot, 1896.

[36] Vööbus, 1962, 1965. See also: Scher, 1908.

[37] Chabot, 1905.

[38] Martin, 1899-1900.

[39] Mingana, 1905.

[40] Connolly-Bishop, 1909.

apologetical treatise by Nestorius,[41] the academic community was therefore ready to see there something less definite than 'Nestorianism'.

In the meantime, writings of the great authors of the Church of the East went on being published. In 1915, in *Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium* series, Arthur Vaschalde published under a Latin title the main Christological treatise by Mār Baḇai Rabbā the *Liber de unione*.[42] Somewhat earlier, in the same series, there appeared a collection of letters of Catholicos Mār Išoyahḇ III, a contemporary to Mār Baḇai.[43] Some publications on their opponent, Martyrius-Sahdōnā, were issued as well.[44] A collection of letters of Mār Timotheus I,[45] some of which had been of obvious value for the development of the theology of the Church of the East, were published in those years, as well as a monograph on this influential catholicos by Jérôme Labourt[46] and the main polemical treatise by the metropolitan of Nisibis Mār Elīyā bar Šināyā.[47] In addition to the *Pearl* by Mār 'Aḇdīšō' bar Brīḵā, published by Joseph Simon Assemani, on the initiative of the Assyrian priest Joseph de Kelaita, the *Paradise of Eden* by the same metropolitan was printed in 1916 in Urmia and reprinted in 1928 in Mosul.[48]

Having mentioned the editions of Urmia and Mosul, it is worth pointing out that in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the activity of Western missions in the Near East (including the Russian Orthodox one) was especially intensive. Most of them worked with a 'Uniate' scenario, converting into their own confession a number of Assyrians and all that they left them from their native Church were at best only the outer forms. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission worked, however, with a rather different approach. The Anglican missionaries were able to understand the correctness and value of the East-Syrian tradition and to demonstrate this to the Western Chistian world. George Percy Badger (1815-88), Arthur John Maclean (1858-1943), William Ainger Wigram (1873-1953) unanimously protested that accusation against the Church of the East of being heretical was unjust.[49]

That the Roman-Catholic Mission, whose activity resulted, in 1830, in setting up a parallel 'Chaldean' Church, in communion with Rome, has

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[41] Nau, 1910; an English, less accurate, translation: Driver-Hodgson, 1925.

[42] Vaschalde, 1915; see also Grumel, 1923-1924.

[43] Duval, 1904-1905.

[44] Goussen, 1897; Bedjan, 1902.

[45] Braun, 1914-1915.

[46] Labourt, 1904.

[47] Horst, 1886.

[48] de Kelaita, 1916, 1928.

[49] Badger, 1852; Maclean-Browne, 1892; Wigram, 1908, 1920; Coakley, 1992, 1995.

been well documented. Unfortunately, these documents have not been available to us, though two books could be mentioned as an introduction to the history of relationship between the Church of Mesopotamia and the Church of Rome: *Genuinae relationes* by Samuel Giamil, published in 1902, and *Syro-Orientales, seu Chaldaei Nestoriani et Romanorum Pontificum primatus* by Mār Giwargis 'Aḇdīšō' Khayyat, a Chaldean patriarch.[50]

The Russian Orthodox mission began its activities soon after the Russian military forces came to Urmia in 1828. Thanks to these events, a series of preliminary historical published surveys on the Assyrians appeared in Russia, as well as on what concerned their Church's past. It is important to mention an article by a Russian missionary who worked in the Russian mission in China, Archimandrite Palladij Kafarov's *Starinnye sledy khristianstva v Kitae po kitajskim istochnikam* [The ancient traces of Chistianity in China according to the Chinese sources], that appeared in 1872. Both the above mentioned discoveries in Semirechje and the 'conversion' of about 8,000 Assyrians to the Russian Orthodoxy which was celebrated on 25th of March 1898 in St.Petersburg, aroused a great interest in the tradition of the Church of the East among Russian scholars. Publications on the history of the East-Syrian Christianity,[51] its spread in Turkestan,[52] and the Antiochene School of exegesis and theology[53] filled all the periodicals. Censorship did not, however, leave much room for manœuvre to theologians, but historians and orientalists felt free enough. In Soviet Russia, under much more sever censorship, any theological research became impossible at all, and only the Syriac language and culture went on being studied by the efforts of N. V. Pigulevskaya (1894-1970),[54] a disciple of P. K. Kokovtsov (1861-1941) and A. P. Alyavdin (1885-1965); as to the *Ideengeschichte*, however, she only followed the Western authors. The archaeological researches going on in the Soviet period, very valuable in themselves, are of little interest for the history of doctrines. Those Russian theologians who emigrated to the

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[50] Giamil, 1902; Khayyat, 1870; See also: Beltrami, 1933 and Levi della Vida, 1948.

[51] Maloma, 1873; Sofonija, 1876; Bolotov, 1901; translation of *A Short History of Syriac Literature* by William Wright, edited and provided with rich notes and appendices by P. K. Kokovtsov: Rajt [Wright], 1902.

[52] Pantusov, 1886a,b; Chwolson, 1890, 1897; Lyutov, 1886; Nikol'skij, 1888; Radloff, 1888; Slutskij, 1889-1891; Rosen, 1890; Halévy, 1890; Barthold, 1893; Kokovtsov, 1907-1908.

[53] Sokolov, 1887; Guryev, 1890; Glubokovskij, 1890.

[54] Complete list of N. V. Pigulevskaya's (also known as Pigoulevskaïa, by a French transcription of her name) publications see: N. V. Pigulevskaya, *Blizhnij Vostok. Vizantija. Slavyane,* Leningrad, 1976, pp. 50-62 or *Atra*, 6 (1996), Saint-Petersburg-Chicago, pp. 19-21.

West soon after 1917, included, like their Western colleagues, special chapters on the Antiochene and Mesopotamian Schools into their works on the Church history and dogmatics.[55]

The middle of the twentieth century as a whole was characterised, in what concerned the studies on the Church of the East, by the following phenomena.

The results and consequences of the activity of Western missions among Assyrians were analysed and some approaches revised. Sudden political changes in the Near East prompted the resumption of what had been done on the threshold of a new historical period.

Works on Church history and history of doctrines appearing in that time included relevant chapters on East-Syrian Christianity in which the new finds and researches were considered. A very important contribution to studying Eastern Christianity was made then by Cardinal E. Tisserant (1884-1972).[56] A renewed interest in history of the Antiochene School was inspired by two publications of Alphonse Mingana — Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary on the Nicene Creed and his sacramentological homilies, both translated from Syriac.[57] Many researchers recognised that in the Syriac version the thought of Theodore sounds much more moderate, which indicated one of the most significant moments in the history of the conflict between the two types — Syrian and Greek — of theological thinking.

In the same epoch, the number of archaeological discoveries concerning the East-Syrian mission towards the East was growing. The expeditions of Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot prompted, in particular, intensive studies of Sogdian culture. Documents in the Sogdian language of an apparently Christian provenance were discovered during these expeditions, and the field of studies attracted the attention of researchers.[58]

An increased number of witnesses to the spread of the Church of the East in the Far East and, in particular, in China enabled a preliminary analysis to be made by that time. These materials were sorted out and published by a Japanese scholar Yoshiro Saeki.[59] It is especially noticeable that he also tried to analyse the doctrinal content of the Eastern documents. Later studies in this field focused mainly on the Far Eastern religious systems, making the process of ideological interaction between them and the missionaries of the Church of the East more understand-

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[55] Florovskij, 1931, 1933; Kartashev, 1932; Bulgakov, 1933.

[56] Tisserant, 1931 (and other relevant articles), 1957.

[57] Mingana, 1932, 1933.

[58] Müller, 1913, 1934.

[59] Saeki, 1937.

able. Some publications on Christianity in India — another fruit of the mission of the Church of the East — appearing at that time, are less useful for the history of the doctrines.

With the development of new methodologies and technologies, scholars were encouraged to continue studying the authors and documents which were already known, so as to find more historical and theological details and also to get a more integrated notion of the theological conceptions of different authors of the Church of the East and of its tradition as a whole. The second half of the twentieth century was marked by special studies on particular subjects.

The Assyrian communities which were formed out of emigrants from the Near East settled in the West, meanwhile, acquired strength. The West met again the Church of the East, now in its own territories. Firsthand information on its heritage became available. The Assyrian emigrants themselves made publications, among the most significant of which the two-volume collection of the homilies by Mār Narsai[60] can be listed, as well as an English translation of the *Pearl* by Mār 'Aḇdīšō' bar Brīḵā of Nisibis made by the Catholicos of the Church of the East Mār Eshai Shimun XXIII, who then lived in the USA.[61]

The theological consultations organised by the *Pro Oriente Foundation*, culminating in the signing, in 1994, of the *Common Christological Declaration* (the original text of which was composed in Syriac[62]) between the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East Mār Dinḥā IV and Pope John-Paul II, were especially significant not only for the mutual understanding and dialogue between the Church of the East and the Roman-Catholic Church, but also for all other Churches. The consultations upon the key issues of dogmatics and sacramentology continue within the *Pro Oriente* dialogue.[63]

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[60] Narsai, 1970.

[61] O'Dishoo, 1965.

[62] Private letter from Fr. Bernard Dupuy of 29th Jan. 1998; Syr. text: *The Messenger* (*Izgadda*), No. 11, March 31, 1995, pp. 43-45.

[63] *Syriac Dialogue* I-IV, 1994-2001.

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SUMMARY

This essay offers a concise overview of the attempts to develop our understanding of East-Syrian Christianity known as the Church of the East, and of studies concerning its history and theological concepts. Beginning with early contacts between Persian Christians and their 'Roman' neighbours, the author further deals with the research that has taken place in modern times. He demonstrates how various aspects became known to the Western academic community, including the East-Syriac version of the Antiochene theological heritage, the Christological controversies which challenge conventional views, and the extensive growth of this Church to the East. The most important authors and publications are listed and a description is given of the distinctive characteristics of the stages of this history of studies.